

Get ready for a family law appointment

Author

Northwest Justice Project

Last Review Date

October 16, 2024

If you're involved in a family law case, and you need to go to mediation, a settlement conference, or a hearing or trial, you might try to get legal help from a lawyer, paralegal, hotline advocate, or domestic violence advocate (<https://www.domesticviolenceinforeferral.org/>). It's helpful to gather and organize your paperwork before your first meeting or phone call with that person. That will let them provide their best help to you.

What if I don't have some of the paperwork listed below?

Our lists are just suggestions. You don't need to have everything we suggest, but it does help. You can try to get any suggested paperwork you don't have.

Example: If you don't have your pay stubs from your job, ask your employer for written confirmation of your wages.

Not all our suggestions will apply to your case. Use your best judgment. **For example**, our lists include suggested paperwork for people with children. If you don't have children, skip those.

How do I get my paperwork together ahead of time?

Use folders or paper clips. Try to organize your paperwork by category and in the order that things happened.

Example: In a divorce, you and your spouse own together shared things of value (called assets). You should make a pile of paperwork related to your assets. Make different tabs for bank accounts, other types of accounts (such as retirement, investment), land and buildings you own (called real property), and personal belongings (called personal property). Put the oldest records at the bottom, newest on top.

I have experienced domestic violence, or my children have. What paperwork should I have ready?

- **Police records** - If you don't have any, contact the police department or Prosecuting Attorney's office for copies, if you're comfortable doing so. You might not get any if there's an ongoing investigation.
- **9-1-1 call logs**
- **Medical records** - If you don't have these, contact your medical provider. You might have to pay for copies.
- **School records**
- **Counselor records** - Be careful with these. The information in them is confidential. It might damage an ongoing relationship with a counselor by revealing confidential information in your court case. For example, if the counselor is seeing your child, it might make the child more reluctant to confide in the counselor. Or the counselor might feel the need to disclose information that you don't want them to.
- **Letters, texts, and emails** between you and the abuser.

I'm getting divorced. What paperwork should I get ready?

Financial paperwork, including:

- Credit card account statements
- Current bills
 - **Example:** medical bills, car loan payments
- Deeds – to home, rental properties, vacation properties, and so on
- Bank statements
- Statements or letters for retirement, or pension accounts and benefits
- Title to personal property such as cars, trucks, boats, and any information about make, model, year, and vehicle identification number
- Prenuptial or community property agreement
- Mortgage or loan paperwork
- Statements or letters for any non-retirement investment accounts
 - **Example:** stocks, bonds
- Tax returns for the past several years

Non-financial paperwork, including

- Anything from the “domestic violence” list, above, if you or a child is a victim
- Any letters or notes from a child’s teacher
- Child’s school records, including attendance records
- Child’s day care records, including attendance records

What else should I have handy?

Write this information down to bring with you:

- **If you’re married:** date and place (county) you got married
- If you’re getting **divorced:** date you separated

- **Dates of birth** for you, the other party, and any children
- **Addresses:** yours, the other party, the children if they live somewhere else
- Where your children have lived for the last 5 years
- Any cause numbers of any **other court cases** involving your children

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice.
Find organizations that provide free legal help on our [Get legal help](#) page.